

# **FY21 Region 4 SMM Grant Competition Selection Rationale**

## **Section I. Summary of Competition and Selection Information**

1. Date announcement was posted:

The FY21 Region 4 SMM Grant Request for Applications (RFA) was issued on September 10, 2021.

2. Give a general description of the type of projects solicited under the competition and note how many applicants applied.

EPA Region 4 announced the grant competition to improve community resilience and sustainability through Sustainable Materials Management (SMM). SMM is a systematic approach to using and reusing materials more productively over their entire lifecycles. It represents a change in how our society thinks about the use of natural resources and environmental protection. By looking at a product's entire lifecycle, we can find new opportunities to reduce environmental impacts, conserve resources and reduce costs. Applicants selected at least one of the following technical assistance methods: a) research, b) investigation, c) experiments, d) education, e) training, f) studies and/or g) demonstration of innovative techniques.

The application deadline was Monday, October 25, 2021 at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time. Region 4 received 16 applications.

3. How many applicants were deemed eligible?

Fifteen applicants were deemed eligible based upon the threshold criteria stated in the RFA.

4. Were any disputes filed?

One applicant was notified of ineligibility, no dispute was filed.

5. Describe how the evaluation and ranking was conducted by the review panel.

Each reviewer performed an independent assessment of each application and performed an unbiased review. Each reviewer received the applications, RFA, evaluation criteria, reviewer instructions, and conflict-of-interest forms. The reviewers were given 15 business days to complete the reviews and the evaluation scoresheets. The applications were scored and ranked from highest to lowest. The Competition Chair facilitated the reviewer panel meeting to discuss the applications and rectify any discrepancies in scores.

6. Provide a description noting that threshold eligibility reviewers, review panelists and the selection official signed conflict of interest statements indicating no conflicts were present.

All threshold and merit reviewers and the selection official signed the conflict of interest statements stating there were no conflicts.

7. List the evaluation criteria that grant applications were evaluated against (e.g., list the evaluation factors and their values from Section V.A of the announcement).

All applications were evaluated using the criteria listed below.

Evaluation Criteria from FY 2021 P2 Grant RFA

Criterion	Maximum Points per Criterion
<p><b>1. Project Summary and Approach.</b> Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on the quality and extent to which the narrative clearly and thoroughly describes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. The project, including the extent to which the project will support and improve community health, resilience, and/or sustainability. <b>(7 points)</b></li><li>b. how the project addresses one of the priorities described in Section I.A. <b>(5 points)</b></li><li>c. the project objectives and your strategy for achieving those objectives. <b>(5 points)</b></li><li>d. how the project addresses the requirements in Section I.C (Strategic Plan Linkage). <b>(3 points)</b></li></ul>	<b>20</b>
<p><b>2. Project Partners, Outreach and Transferability:</b> Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on the quality and extent to which the narrative clearly and thoroughly describes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. A plan to use and leverage the resources and expertise of partners and stakeholders in the project, including how each partner will play a role and contribute to the success of the project. Alternatively, to what extent is it explained how the project will successfully meet the project objectives without partners <b>(7 points)</b></li><li>b. How the results of the project will be effectively communicated to interested stakeholders. <b>(5 points)</b></li><li>c. How the project might be replicated and transferrable to other communities. <b>(4 points)</b></li><li>d. The extent to which any letters from partners and/or stakeholders explain their role and contribution to the project. <b>(4 points)</b> <b>Applicants will receive zero points if letters are not included.</b></li></ul> <p><b>3. Project Sustainability.</b> Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on the</p>	<b>20</b>

quality and extent to which the narrative realistically describes:

- a. how the project supports and/or aligns with a state and/or local mandate, policy, and/or community priority to improve community health, resilience and/or sustainability. **(5 points)**
- b. how the SMM project encompasses innovative approaches (e.g., not usual, routine, or established practices) that have the capacity to institute real change. **(15 points)**
- c. how the project will address or facilitate the identification and reduction of threats to the communities that have environmental justice challenges and/or disproportionately share the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and/or commercial operations or policies or explain why it does not. **(5 points)**

<p>4. <b>Project Tasks, Budget and Measuring Progress.</b> Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on the quality and extent to which the narrative clearly and thoroughly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. describes the project tasks and subtasks, including the personnel responsible for each task and subtask and the cost estimate for each task. <b>(5 points)</b></li> <li>b. describe how the cost estimates for each task were developed and, where appropriate, the other partners for each task. <b>(3 points)</b></li> <li>c. provides an itemized budget containing eligible costs for personnel, fringe benefits, contractual, travel, equipment, supplies, and other direct costs, indirect costs, and total costs that are reasonable and realistic to complete the project. The extent to which the costs correlate with the project tasks. <b>(7 points)</b></li> <li>d. identifies outputs and outcomes for each project task. <b>Quantitative targets are necessary to receive full points.</b> The extent to which your plan and approach for measuring progress for achieving those expected project outcomes and outputs is described. <b>(5 points)</b></li> <li>e. provides a reasonable and realistic schedule with completion dates of milestones and significant tasks that demonstrate that the project goals and objectives will be completed within the two-year project period of performance <b>(5 points)</b></li> <li>f. includes approach, procedures, and controls for ensuring that awarded grant funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner <b>(5 points)</b></li> </ul>	<b>30</b>
<p>4. <b>Programmatic Capability and Past Performance.</b> Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on the quality and extent to which they demonstrate their ability to successfully complete and manage the project, including the degree to which the narrative clearly and thoroughly describes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. successful past performance and outcomes in completing and managing projects of similar size, scope, and relevance to the project. <b>(4 points)</b></li> <li>b. a history of meeting the reporting requirements under previous assistance agreements, including whether you adequately and timely reported on your progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes, whether acceptable final reports were submitted and if such progress was not being made, whether you adequately reported why not <b>(3 points)</b></li> <li>c. The organizational experience and capacity to plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the project. The extent to which the staff expertise, qualifications, and knowledge, and other resources demonstrates the project goals will be achieved. Alternatively, the extent to which it is described how these staff or resources will be obtained. <b>(3 points)</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> In evaluating applicants under this criterion, the Agency will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources including agency files and prior/current grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information supplied by the applicant).</p>	<b>10</b>

8. Confirm that applications were evaluated against the criteria and point distribution stated in Section V.A. of the RFA.

All applications were evaluated using the evaluation criterion and points stated in the RFA Section V.A. The evaluation scoresheets provided the criteria and point distribution from the RFA Section V.A.

9. Rank the scores of all applicants.

Selected applicants and final scores based on the average of the reviewers, are listed below in rank order. 4Roots, University of Georgia and LOSRC are recommended for funding based on their high scores, strong applications, and adherence to the national priorities.

Grant Proposal	Final Score
4Roots- Preventing Food Waste & Loss	94
UGA- Municipal Recycling Markets	94
LOSRC-Preventing Food Waste & Loss	92

10. Comment on anything else that may be pertinent to the competition.

These (3) three applications are recommended for funding, no other applications are recommended to be funded. \$74,731 remaining

## **Section II. Explain Why the Application is Selected for Award Based on the Evaluation Criteria and Requirements of the RFA**

1. Demonstrate that the award selection recommendation is based on an assessment of the applicant's application against the evaluation criteria and the requirements of the RFA.

The Competition Chair is recommending the applicants for award based on the results of the scoring using the evaluation criteria in the RFA. The recommended applicants thoroughly addressed the evaluation criteria and the final scores for the applications ranged from 55 to 94 out of a possible 105 points. Evaluation scores are summarized below. Two applications are recommended for funding based on the reviewer's scores and the available funding.

2. Summarize the technical evaluation results for selecting the applicant's application, the strengths of the application, and how the applicant was evaluated under the evaluation criteria.

**4 Roots** received **94** out of 105 points on the 5 ranking criteria. The applicant received the following scores (averaged across scores from all reviewers) out of the possible total for each criterion category:

Criterion 1 – Project Summary and Priority Support.	19/20 points
Criterion 2 – Project Partners, Outreach and Transferability.	16/20 points
Criterion 3 – Project Sustainability	23/25 points

Criterion 4 –Project Tasks, Budget and Measuring Progress  
Criterion 5- Programmatic Capability and Past Performance

26/30 points  
10/10 points

Strengths: 4 Roots is requesting \$100,000- (RFA Priority 2: Preventing Food Loss and Waste) Sustainable Food System Network- Bringing together partners who work on every part of the food system from growing to distributing to vulnerable communities to composting food that cannot be eaten. This project will establish multi-layered distribution channels for farmers, distributors and end markets of all sizes. This project exemplifies innovation. A proven systems-based approach that is having a powerful impact in Orlando and Florida. This organization understands how to connect the dots from small, medium, and large farms and farmers and they have all the partners in place in Atlanta to be highly successful.

**UGA** received **94** out of 105 points on the 5 ranking criteria. The applicant received the following scores for each criterion category:

Criterion 1 – Project Summary and Approach.	19/20 points	
Criterion 2 –Project Partners, Outreach and Transferability	17/20 points	
Criterion 3-- Project Sustainability.	22/25 points	
Criterion 4– Project Tasks, Budget and Measuring Progress	26/30 points	s
Criterion 5 – Programmatic Capability and Past Performance	10/10 points	

Strengths: UGA (RFA Priority 1: Municipal Recycling Markets) is requesting \$75,269- Circularity in the SE- Increase the resilience of the rural recycling in R4, led by a cohort of three rural areas in GA, NC, and SC. UGA will facilitate the implementation of the Circularity Assessment Protocol (CAP), analysis, synthesis, and the creation of a network of communities and partners in R4 sharing data through workshops, webinars, and the already-established portal. This project includes several phases, engages the community and then implement their interventions for a 12- month period and records their findings, systems-based approach, using EPA’s Data Tracker.

**Land of Sky Regional Council (LOSRC)** received **92** out of 100 points and was evaluated highly on each (or most) of the 5 ranking criteria. The applicant received the following scores for each criterion category:

Criterion 1 – Project Summary and Approach.	18/20 points
Criterion 2 – Project Partners, Outreach and Transferability	16/20 points
Criterion 3 – Project Sustainability.	20/25 points
Criterion 4 – Project Tasks, Budget and Measuring Progress	28/30 points
Criterion 5-- Programmatic Capability and Past Performance	10/10 points

Strengths: LOSRC (RFA Priority 2: Preventing Food Loss and Waste) requesting \$50,000, proposes creation of “Don’t Waste Food North Carolina, a Food Waste Awareness Campaign in North Carolina modeled after SC’s successful campaign.” Using three strategies (1) one-on-one technical assistance to commercial and institutional food service sectors (2) development of transferrable resources such as resources, guidance and success stories and a self-assessment tool for restaurants, hospitality, grocery retailers, manufacturers, produce packing facilities, schools, colleges, and universities (3) Supporting NC DEQ and other state partners in implementing the “*Don’t Waste Food NC*” campaign.

No applicants were selected out of rank order.

### **Section III. Explain Why Applicants Were Not Selected for Award Based on the Evaluation Criteria**

The following Twelve (12) remaining applicants were not selected for award based on the quality of applications received:

UKY, SWIX, SERDC, FRN, Ecology, RTI, Mohammad School, Miami, FAU, AGO, UP, and UGL (rationale follows)

- 1) **FAU- \$100,000** to develop made-to-order activated carbon adsorbent materials using packaging waste (e.g., paper-based food packaging, plastic bags, and plastic bottles) as precursor. The materials, with or without surface modifications, will be used for capturing air pollutants (CO<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>S, and VOCs) from garbage and handling activities using microwave heating to minimize material synthesis costs. This is more experimental than innovative and the amount requested realistically won't even begin to scratch the surface of the necessary funding to get such a project from research and development to use if it's even deemed to be a good idea and not using waste to create more waste. Funding may be more appropriate from ORD and a potential STARS grant where several years and hundreds of thousands of dollars are available. **92/105**
- 2) **Ecology Action of Santa Cruz- \$74,812** Food Waste Prevention Certificate Program for Food Retail Workers in mid-size Grocery Stores in NC and SC. Prevent food waste in store operations by quantifying food waste, identifying best food waste prevention practices, developing an employee food waste prevention certificate program, piloting in three stores and measuring the results of the certificate program pilot. Many industries have developed Certification Programs for example electronics, compost industry, green seal, etc. This is not an innovative approach that has the capacity to institute real change, but rather an in-store training for grocery store employees. Similar programs have been put in place by this organization for almost 10 years. **92/105**
- 3) **University of KY- \$100,000-** A systems-based digitally-integrated Approach to Increase Food Recovery. Project will leverage 6R principles and apply a systems-based approach in sustainability while utilizing cloud-based technologies to digitally integrate and share information among stakeholders to enhance efficacy of food waste recovery. Demonstration pilot project in Lexington Fayette Urban County region of Kentucky will include current practices, developing a model for FWR and redistribution and developing a cloud-based tool for FWR logistics management and increase community awareness. So many different logistics tools are available, is there a need for UKY to create their own and at such an expensive cost? Applicant shows no plan of attack for how to replicate the project elsewhere, project may have benefitted from focusing resources on just the tool rather than spreading out between awareness campaign (not as innovative) and the tool, duplication efforts with other online platforms, project tasks seem too big for only this amount of funding, heavy emphasis on graduate students to develop the tool. **90/105**
- 4) **AGO-** The AGO is requesting **\$95,221** to build and maintain a regional network of gleaning organizations in EPA R4. A portion of those funds will also go toward creating a database system specifically designed for the gleaning community. Networks and data collection is not unusual, is routine, and although may be necessary does not put in place partnerships that would be expected to institute real change. Gleaners are still in their silos, doing their gleaning independent of public or private partners, non-profits or for-profits that would be highly likely to prevent food waste. Does software and/or a platform already exist that can be used or adapted to include gleaning data capture? This project is a place for this organization to collect and store their data. **89/105**

- 5) **Mohammed School- \$99,100**-Full Circle Education and Food Preservation Program, educating the school communities about food safety, canning, preservation and activating the school kitchens during the summer. Canning and education is a necessary piece of the food waste prevention but this is only a small piece, not systems-based, not innovation that will create real change. Costs exceed micro-purchase threshold of \$10,000, unclear where the high kitchen use costs come from, lacks detail about how this project would be transferable and scalable. **88/105**
- 6) **Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International- -\$95,420**, Characterizing the Benefits of Intervention, proposes to collect data and information and develop a food loss and waste intervention benefits estimation model for Region 4- the concept includes engagement of key stakeholders to collect data and information about Food Loss and Waste (FLW) interventions and use in conjunction with Region-specific food waste generation and baseline reduction data to estimate additional reduction potential for FLW interventions over time. This type of work is already being done by NRDC, ReFed, and others, this is not innovative but duplicative and unnecessary. **82/105**
- 7) **SERDC- \$95,000**- Recycling Market Development Resource Center, all-in-one digital tool with multi-faceted areas, including a market directory, material marketplace, manufacturing mapping tool, and resource center for market development tools. In addition, SERDC will serve as the education and training center for workshops, webinars and in-person conferences. This sounds like several separate projects all dropped into an on-line tool and resource storage system. It's not innovative or new and reviewers concerned that it just turns into another online tool no one uses. Over the years we have helped fund many on-line marketplaces or exchanges that were not well used, or publicized. Budget and cost estimates are not sufficiently broken down. Criteria not fully addressed. **80/105**
- 8) **Urban Green Lab - \$100,000** educational awareness recycling campaign targeting 2 underserved communities in Nashville: Urban and Rural. An educational awareness recycling campaign is pretty standard, not seeing anything truly innovative, it does take into account an urban and rural underserved community but provides info on measuring changes due to campaign, lacks strategy, doesn't mention addressing food waste. **79/105**
- 9) **Food Recovery Network-\$85,000**-To continue Community-Based Gleaning work

The original project is close to completion, the purpose was to rescue farm surplus and find end markets to create a new market and earn revenue so it would stay sustainable. Criterion 2: Project Partners, Outreach and Transferability needs more detail, no community partner identified, applicant shows no plan for how to replicate the project or how project results will be communicated. Criterion 4: Project Tasks, Budget, and measuring progress includes no subtasks so details as to who, when and how are not clearly defined, cost estimates detail not provided and budget is not itemized just an aggregate number is provided for each category, no plan for measuring success and project timeline seems overly ambitious. An organization with the ability to take this project to the next step is needed. Continuing this project will not make it innovative and the narrative project does not further launch the project or institute real change **78/105**

- 10) **University of Miami- \$99,679** Augmented Reality Web Application for Education on SMM- Develop an artificial intelligence (AI) model and augmented reality (AR) web application that not only recognizes



materials but provides geographic insights based on recyclability. Works by using mobile phone to scan materials and receive immediate insights on whether the material is recyclable locally and sustainability related info. App will be deployed by embedded into local government websites.

Although this appears very innovative and was developed using known tools such as WARM model and Recycling Partnership's updated version the project objectives and strategy for achieving the objectives of the project was missing, as well as a plan and approach for measuring success. **75/105**

11) SWIX- \$100,000 -Mixed Glass community recycling collection program to be used in road construction. Review panel does not have the confidence that this project can be successful, application lacks sufficient details: Project Summary in Criterion 1 only one objective is listed and details for strategy and achieving this objectives is lacking, in Criterion 2 Project Partners, Outreach and Transferability, including how applicant will establish partnerships and what communities they are targeting is not addressed in any detail, no plan for leveraging resources, no real plan for communicating results, no plan for transferability, no letters of support from partners. Criterion 3 Project Sustainability is not addressed, details about how this project is innovative is missing, EJ is not addressed. Criterion 4 Project Tasks, Budget and Measuring Progress, no mention of how costs were developed, no itemized budget **55/105**

12) United Against Poverty- \$99,000 to partner with Government and NGO to transport food waste from generation to depackage, use in compost recipe and sell back to retail locations to earn revenue instead of being buried in a landfill and cost money. **The funding for this project was to buy a truck for transportation. 55/105**

#### **Section IV. Demonstrate that the Proposed Award Amount is Consistent with the RFA Section II, Funding Amounts and Award Ranges**

All proposed award amounts for selected applicants are consistent with the terms of the RFA. The RFA noted that EPA Region 4 would anticipate awarding approximately \$300,000 under this announcement. EPA Region 4 EPA anticipated awarding approximately 3-7 grants, ranging from approximately \$40,000 to \$100,000, subject to the availability of funds, the quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations. All *selected* applicants are recommended to be awarded funds in this range based on available funds.

#### **Section V. Recommended Funding Amounts**

There is currently a total of \$300,000 available for funding, we are recommending awarding three (3) grants totaling \$225,269. Of the \$300,000, \$183,000 in FY21 is expiring funds. The below chart explains the breakdowns.

Recommended Applicant	Score	Total 2-year Amount Requested	Amount Selected for Funding Scenario #1 (current decision)	
-----------------------	-------	-------------------------------	--	--

4Roots	94	\$100,000	\$100,000 (100% funded)	
UGA	94	\$75,269	\$75,269 (100% funded)	
LOSRC	92	\$50,000	\$50,000 (100% funded)	
		<b>\$225,269</b>	<b>\$225,269</b>	